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How the A-11 Was Born

President Johnson's announcement that the United States has developed an advanced experimental jet plane, whose performance "far exceeds that of any other aircraft in the world today," has an interesting political and engineering background.

Mr. Johnson explained that the disclosure of the 2,000-mile-an-hour plane, dubbed the A-11, was being made to permit the "orderly exploitation" of its advanced technology. But the announcement also tends to undercut those critics of the Administration—notably Senator Goldwater, other Congressmen and the Air Force—who have been urging the continued development of manned aircraft, an issue that was acquiring some importance in the Presidential campaign. At the same time the disclosure notifies Russia that the United States retains a technological lead.

Chronologically and technologically, the A-11 is simply what was once called unofficially the U-3, a drastically modified follow-on to the famous Lockheed U-2. Numerous high-altitude reconnaissance flights over the Soviet Union were made by the U-2 until one was shot down in 1960, with consequences that shook Russian-American relations.

The new plane was originally intended for the same purpose of high altitude reconnaissance. Experts knew as long ago as 1958 that the development of Soviet antiaircraft missiles would sooner or later doom the U-2 which had a ceiling in its original version of about 70,000 feet, and actually flew, in later versions, up to 90,000 feet. The U-3 follow-up, started in 1959 in the Eisenhower Administration, was intended for flight at about 120,000 feet and at higher speeds than the U-2 was capable of making. In its original conception, it was to have been purely an unarmed reconnaissance aircraft.

However, the development of reconnaissance satellites with cameras of fantastic power and clarity lessened materially the need for the U-3. The President's announcement means not only that the development of a new high-flying reconnaissance plane has been completed but also that the lessons learned are now being applied to the further development of a manned interceptor, high-speed bombers and commercial airliners intended to fly at three times the speed of sound.

The A-11 does not in itself meet the needs of any of these types. It is not a combat plane but an experimental jet, which gets its altitude by increased speed and improved engine rather than by the long, glider-like U-2 wings.

It may never carry weapons; if it does, the present version may have to be materially modified. It represents an engineering breakthrough on several fronts and a tribute to Lockheed, but it will not satisfy the need for an advanced manned interceptor, a long-range bomber or a new high-speed commercial craft.

NEW YORK TIMES
MAR 2 1964

Spy Plane Recalled

Special to The New York Times

MOSCOW, March 1—A Soviet newspaper printed an account last week of a visit to the ground-to-air missile unit near Sverdlovsk in the Urals that "downed a spy plane with the first shot May 1, 1960."

The plane was the United States U-2 piloted by Francis Gary Powers, but the newspaper, Sovietskaya Moldaviya, did not mention that.

The occasion for the article was Armed Forces Day.

WASHINGTON POST AND TIMES HERALD

MAR 2 1964

2000-mph Jet's Success Proved, Russell Reveals

Associated Press

Sen. Richard B. Russell (D-Ga.) said yesterday there are 11 or 12 of the newly unvieled United States "manned missile" jet fighter planes already flying and that they have successfully passed numerous tests.

Russell, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said he had known about the 2000-mile-an-hour A11 since work first began on it in 1959, although President Johnson just announced its existence Saturday.

The Senator, interviewed on the radio and television program "Face the Nation," (WTOP, CBS) indicated the plane is far advanced in required tests.

"It's been put through all kinds of tests," he said, adding that others are continuing. He said it is virtually in shape to be accepted formally by the Air Force.

President Johnson told his news conference Saturday that the plane's performance "far exceeds that of any other aircraft in the world today."

It is about 400 miles an hour faster than the swiftest of U.S. jets now in use and is reported capable of operating at altitudes in excess of 70,000 feet.

Russell said that although many features of the plane must remain classified he thinks Mr. Johnson was correct in announcing it at this time, partly because it is now almost certain to be seen.

Russell said his knowledge of the plane's existence was the reason he recently knocked out of an appropriation bill a $40-million request for funds to develop an improved manned interceptor.

He said he does not know why the Air Force asked for the money, when it also knew of the A11.

(One possible explanation of the Air Force request, it was suggested yesterday, was for the purpose of advancing the A11's status as a future weapons system. Additional funds leading toward earlier possible production of the A11 would also help to convince the Pentagon to approve the plane as a weapons system.

(Despite the designation "A", usually applied only to Navy attack planes, the A11 was designed as an Air Force interceptor and not as a Navy plane.)